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Dr.Fatoumata KEITA & Dr.Binta KOITA



**First Edition of the Symposium on English Language
Teaching and Literature Studies (SELLS) : Disciplinary
Debates and Emerging Research Perspectives
March 29th, and 30th, 2023 Université des Lettres et des
Sciences Humaines de Bamako sise à Kabala**



Thème : Disciplinary Debates and Emerging Research



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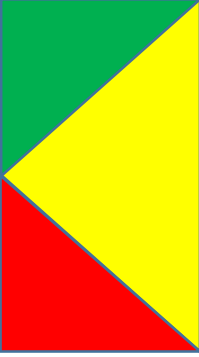
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The African Journal Kurukan Fuga is an online scientific journal of the Department of Education and Research in English (DER English) of the University of Letters and Human Sciences of Bamako. It is a quarterly Journal which appears in March, June, September and December. The African Journal Kurukan Fuga was set up from the desire of the English Department professors to enrich their university landscape, which is quite poor in scientific journals (three journals for the whole university). Indeed, more and more young teacher-researchers arrive in our universities, and higher education institutions and institutes with very limited publication opportunities. The English Department is a case in point, with more than forty young doctors and doctoral students producing scientific articles which almost always have to be published elsewhere. The African Journal Kurukan Fuga intends to boost scientific research by offering larger publication spaces with its four annual publications. The creation of this journal is therefore intended as a response to the many requests made by many teacher-researchers in Mali and elsewhere who often do not have free access to quality online documentation for teaching and research. The journal favors texts in English; however, texts in other languages are also accepted.

The journal publishes only quality articles that have not been published or submitted for publication in any other journals. Each article is subjected to a double blind reading. The quality and originality of the articles are the only criteria for publication.



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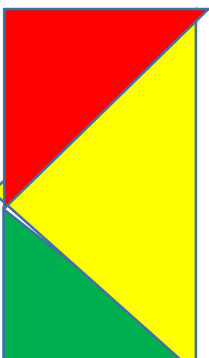
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Call for Abstract
First Edition of the Symposium on English Language
Teaching and Literature Studies (SELLS): Disciplinary
Debates and Emerging Research Perspectives

The Research Community of the English Department at Université des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Bamako (Arts and Humanities of Bamako) in collaboration with Ecole Normale Supérieure, Bamako, Mali, organize **the First Symposium on English Language Teaching and Literature Studies (SELLS 2023) on the theme “Disciplinary Debates and Emerging Research Perspectives” at ULSHB located in Kabala campus on March 29th and 30th, 2023.** The Symposium aims to provide a platform to research scholars, graduate students, and doctoral students working in the fields of English language teaching and literature studies to share their experiences and knowledge and discuss new and emerging trends in research and pedagogy in English language teaching and literature written in English language.

The theme of this year, titled: **“Disciplinary Debates and Emerging Research Perspectives”** is an attempt to explore new directions and dynamism of the study and teaching of English language in Mali and other francophone countries. With English taught in a multilingualistic and multicultural environment, researchers and scholars from the English departments will consider through this symposium how English is impacting the social, political, cultural, and economic lives of learners and users at a larger scale. Further, through interdisciplinary junction this symposium will be an opportunity to question and rethink pedagogical modalities of English teaching to reach creative and emerging solutions. Scholars in the field will be offered exciting opportunities to discuss, collaborate and propose emerging linguistic, literary, and communication perspectives to enhance teaching and research in English in the Malian context while paying attention to Global trends.

Areas of Research Focus

Topics to be considered are but not limited to the following:

English Language Studies

Literature in English and criticism

Teaching Literature in English

Applied Linguistics and English Language Education

English Language Curriculum and Teaching Methods

Cross-cultural Communication and English Language Teaching

English Language Policy

English language assessment

English Language and Globalization

English Language, Media and Communication

English Language Learning and Acquisition

English Language Testing and Evaluation

Multilingualism and Translation

Psychology of English Language Learning

Technology and E-learning

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Translation, interpretation

Translation and Media

Literature and civilization

Malian Literature in English

American Literature

British Literature
Commonwealth Literature
African literature
Women's literature
English, literature and media
Contemporary Literature
Comparative Literature
Postcolonial literature and English
World Literature
Multicultural Literature
Gender, Literature and English Language

Deadlines for submission of the abstracts

Sending of the call: January 28, 2022

Deadline for Submission: February 28, 2023

Notification of acceptance March 15, 2023

Date of the symposium: Thursday, March 29th and Friday 30th, 2023

Abstract Submission

The abstract should be between 200 and 250 words and a list of not more than five keywords. The format of the abstract should be New Times Roman, font size 12. It must have a clearly defined theoretical framework or approach. The abstracts should be sent to the following addresses: binette8fr@gmail.com or fkkeita5@gmail.com or niambeldio20@gmail.com

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CHALLENGES OF LEARNING ENGLISH ACADEMIC WRITING IN A MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT: CASE OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF FLSL¹

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Abstract:

This paper explores challenges that students evolving in a multicultural context like Mali face when they engage into writing in English as a Foreign language. The purpose is to identify the constrains that students face, which can in any way hinder their writing performance and impact their motivation in academic writing. A sample of twenty (20) students and five (5) teachers participated to the study through in-depth interview of both groups. In addition, students' written scrips were analyzed by the researcher. The findings revealed that students 'writing performance are impeded by significant challenges such as lack of confidence, Lack of practice and language interference. Practical recommendations are made to hove students' writing proficiencies.

Key words: Challenges, Foreign, language, Performance, Writing,

Résumé

Cet article explore les défis auxquels les étudiants qui évoluent dans un contexte multiculturel comme le Mali sont confrontés lorsqu'ils s'engagent dans l'écriture en anglais comme langue étrangère. L'objectif est d'identifier les contraintes auxquelles les étudiants sont confrontés, qui peuvent de quelque manière entraver leur performance écrite et avoir un impact sur leur motivation dans la rédaction académique. Un échantillon de vingt (20) élèves et cinq (5) enseignants ont participé à l'étude à travers des entretiens approfondis des deux groupes. De plus, les écrits des étudiants ont été analysés par le chercheur. Les résultats ont révélé que le rendement des élèves en rédaction est entravé par des défis importants comme le manque de confiance, le manque d'exercice et l'interférence linguistique des langues des étudiants. Des recommandations pratiques sont faites pour améliorer les compétences en rédaction des élèves.

Mots clés : Écriture , Défis, Langue, étrangère, Performance

Introduction

¹ Faculty of Letters, Languages and Language Sciences of Bamako

Writing is an important skill used for many purposes. We create and maintain personal relationship through writing. It is a powerful tool used for building and sharing stories, information, and views. It further allows researchers and scholars to share their research, studies, and results to an extended audience. In addition, writing is one of the most important subjects taught at university, and which mastery is a requirement for students to succeed in both their academic and professional career. In fact, whether in class or as a homework, students carry many of their academic assignments in writing. Besides, at the end of their academic career, students are requested to write a dissertation or thesis to graduate for an academic degree. Writing also serves as a learning tool for students, as it helps them memorize what they read (Graham, 2019).

Given its importance, academic writing has recently gained a growing interest from different scholars and researchers over the last decade. Studies have documented different concerns of teaching or learning academic writing, and many have evoked challenges related to writing in English, specially in the contexts in which English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). Various challenges that hindered students proficiency in writing and constraints related to time pressure (Gebhard, Willett, Jiménez Caicedo & Piedra, 2010;Graham2018, 2019), students motivation(Soltero-Gonzalez, Escamilla, & Hopewell 2012), teachers training and competence (Kibler, Heny, & Andrei 2016; Larsen 2016; Soltero-Gonzalez, Escamilla, & Hopewell 2012; Wong, 2016), strategies and materials used (Bhowmik and Kim 2021), writers language skills, and social and cultural context of writers(Haider 2012;) have largely documented results of undertaken studies.

In addition to these challenges, research also has identified students' first language and first culture interference to impede their English writing proficiency. Research have found that students having English as their additional language (second or third) transfer aspects of their first language in their English essays. Mbaye (2001) in his dissertation has suggested French organizational interference in students' English writings resulting in students following the 'These-Antithese and Synthese or French Dissertation written organization. By the same token, Koita (2023) in her study on the interference of French on Malian students' writings has found that French interferes in the writing of students in many ways, including organization, grammar and French vocabulary.

In Mali, West African country colonized by France, students learn to write academic English mainly at university when they enroll at the Department of English. Before the University, they learn academic learning mainly in French, which is the main language used to teach most subjects. English is introduced as a foreign language in secondary school and students are just taught basic English in most subjects. It is therefore important to investigate difficulties undergraduate students face while writing their paragraphs and essays in English. However, despite growing interest into questions and issues related to teaching and learning academic writing in English as a Foreign Language context, there is a paucity of research that have dealt with this question in Mali.

As far as the objective of the study is concerned, the study therefore seeks to investigate the constrains that hinder students' proficiency in writing in English as a foreign language. To ensure the correct implementation of the study, the following research questions are actually formulated:

- What challenges FLSL students face in academic writing?
- How does these challenges impact students' writing in FLSL?

Structurally, the paper is divided into two sections. The first section presents and describes the methodology used to collect and analyze the research data. The second one presents and discusses the results of the study in consistence with the formulated research questions.

1-Methodology

This section introduces the process of collecting and analyzing the data in accordance with the above-mentioned research questions. It will deal with the sample, the procedure of collecting and analyzing the data.

1.1. Participants

To investigate challenges faced by students in their writings, qualitative data was collected from both undergraduate students enrolled in the Department of English and composition teachers in the same department. A total sample of students twenty (20) - 12 male and 08 female and five (05) teachers have participated to the study. All the students were attending license classes, meaning they are third year university students and have enough experience writing in English. On the other hand, selected teachers have also good experience in teaching composition, for they have all been teaching academic writing at university for more than five (5) years. All the participants consented

on their participation and have signed the consent forms after having checked the terms of the forms.

1.2. Procedure

The data was collected through an in-depth interview of both students and teachers. The interview duration was 1h -35 minutes for both set of participants. The interviews took place at the university according to the convenience of participants. All participants signed consent forms that describe the rationale and objectives of the study before sitting for the interviews. In addition to the interviews, students were asked to produce a four to five paragraph essay on the topic stated below:

‘In a four or five paragraphs essay, state your opinion about the effects of the internet.’

2.Data Analysis

Both the interview data and the written scripts were collected and analyzed manually using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was used to generate themes given its flexibility (Joffe & Yardley, 2003), which allows the researchers to move back and forth as needed throughout the analysis (Brian & Clark, 2006). After a meticulous reading of the data, it was coded by following the six steps proposed by Brian and Clark (2006). The researcher then proceeded to categorize the different codes into potential themes. After a thorough review of the codes and themes, and guiding by the research questions, the researchers decided on which themes to maintain and which ones to eliminate before presenting the results. Further, all the real names of teachers and students were replaced by pseudonyms for the sake of anonymity.

2.1. Findings

The findings from the data analysis generated three major themes. After analyzing the data, it was found out that students were facing challenges in their academic writing because of lack of confidence, language interference and lack of practice.

2.1.1. Theme 1-Lack of confidence

Lack of confidence is the first challenge that EFL students face when they strive to engage into academic writing. Both the interview analysis of students and teachers have revealed that students

are not motivated to write because they think they are not equipped enough with the requiring skills they need for writing. Some report that they lack the appropriate vocabulary and grammar to write appropriately. For example, one student that we call Aissata, report her experience through these terms: “I like writing, but whenever I try to write, I am so afraid of failing that all my vocabulary flies away. I feel like crippled, and I can’t write anything. Most of time I eventually give up.” (Interview). Like Aissata, other students feel anxiety when trying to write. This is specially the case when students are writing for an exam assignment or when they are afraid of getting negative feedback from the teacher. For example, another student Omar confess:

As a student in license, writing is an important aspect of our daily activities. During the exam of many subjects like composition, literature, or linguistics the teacher asks us to write essays. In class sometimes with my friends, as a group work it is ok. But during the exam, I lose all my confidence. I don’t know if what I am writing is good or not. In addition, there is time pressure, so we must hurry up. (interview)

As can be seen through this quotation, lack of confidence can impact students writing abilities and make them fail to produce quality written productions. It happens that students master the subject matter but cannot put into correct words or sentences what they are asked to produce because they think that it will not be correct.

2.1.2. Theme 2- Language interference

In addition to lack of confidence, the data analysis has revealed that language interference can cause a significant challenge to students when they write in English as a foreign language. Both the analysis of students’ writing scripts and the interviews of teachers have revealed that students’ background languages, that is French, and their mother tongue (Bambara) has an impact on their essays. The analysis of the written production has revealed students’ essays were influenced by the French organization, French words, and French grammar. For example, below an example of an introductory paragraph in which French organization is used:

Today the internet has become a useful tool that students use for many purposes. This essay is to know the effects of the internet today. I think that the internet has both positive and negative effects on young people today and my essay will demonstrate how these two aspects of the internet are seen today. (a student’s writing script)

This quotation shows instances of French organization called the ‘Dialectical plan’ on students’ writing. However, French language was not the only language which has influenced students written production. The analysis has founded that students mother tongue(Bambara) has also an impact on their writings. This was mainly noticed in students use of literal translation of mother tongue to English in their writings and their translation of mother tongue proverbs and sayings. As an instance, this student has used literal translation in his paragraph to describe how the effects of internet can affect children.

Children in Africa sometimes absorb everything they see on the internet, and they think it is true. But they need to know that even when a stick spends a longue time in water, it will not turn into a crocodile. They should know that they cannot change their cultures. Children should be selecting what they watch and how they use it in your daily lives. (a student’s writing script)

This quotation is a clear instance of socio-cultural impact on students writing. For example, this student has translated directly from his mother tongue Bambara a proverb that English to warn people of the effect of the internet on culture. Understanding of this proverb requires in a way a mutual cultural sharing.

The analysis of the different interviews from teachers have also revealed that they think language interference has a major impact on students writing in English. For instance, one teacher that we will call Harouna, has shared with us his perspectives on this point. Here is what he says: “I have seen many instances of language interference in my students’ writings. I have found for example that students replace English grammar by French grammar and that they translate exactly what they write in French to English.” (Interview)

A third theme that has emerged from the data analysis on the challenges students face when writing in English as foreign language, is that of lack of practice by students.

2.1.3. Theme 3: Lack of Practice

During the interview conversations with students, many have credited their incompetence in writing to the limited opportunity for practice they receive. Many think that they do not have enough opportunities to write in English, and some have confessed that they write only when assigned by the teacher of writing or they are sitting for an exam. That is the case of one participant that we call Mohamed: “For me the main problem is the lack of practice. I think that we lack

opportunities for writing, apart from the exams we take here at the university. We have no space where we can practice our writing skills, and this has a clear impact on our writing competence.” (Interview). The data analysis of teacher’s interview has shown that as Mohamed, some teachers also think that students’ lack of writing opportunities is a hinder to their written skills performance. For instance, one teacher, Mark believes that students are neither given enough time for writing nor enough writing opportunities. Here is what he thinks:

When it comes to writing, students are given so little opportunities that it does not allow them to learn and practice the skills they need. For example, in the exams, teacher give them short writing assignments and they are given long written assignments, students complain because they don’t know how to write more than an essay or a paragraph(interview).

It is evident that students lack opportunities to practice and extend their written skills at FLSL, and this is contributing to impede their writing impacting their skills overall. Students, therefore, along with their teachers must develop strategies to improve their writing skills and foster their proficiency.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that students in FLSL face different challenges when they write in English as a Foreign Language. Issues such as lack of confidence, language interference and lack of practice were reported from the data analysis. It was found out that these difficulties contribute to significantly lower the quality of students written productions. Add to these difficulties is student’s multilingual context in which English is an additional language. This renders its daily practice for most students difficult. Based on the above findings, both students and teachers should think about elaborating strategies which could motivate students into more writing and therefore hove their competence. Students can think about integrating writings hubs or clubs, where they could have daily or weekly writing activities. On the other hand, teachers should think of giving more engaging writing assignments to students which would urge students to more reading and research.

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